UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
FACULTY OF MUSIC

Sound Worlds

Presented by Norbert Palej

2025 University of Toronto New Music Festival
Reza Vali, Roger D. Moore Distinguished Visitor in Composition
Norbert Palej, *festival coordinator*

Sunday, February 2, 2025 at 7:30pm | Walter Hall, 80 Queen's Park

PROGRAM

Sirius Piano Duo: Pei-Chen Chen and Mengjie Xiong, piano

Before Gravity (2012)

David Lang

The Ringing Earth from Afterimages (1981)

Alexina Louie

懷 Nostalgia (2011)

Ching-Yu Hsiau

Effervescent Air (2012)

Nancy Galbraith

I. Effervescent Air
II. Sylphine Sails
III. Coal and Ice

After Gravity (2007)

David Lang

Intermission

We wish to acknowledge this land on which the University of Toronto operates. For thousands of years, it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the Credit. Today, this meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.

As part of the Faculty's commitment to improving Indigenous inclusion, we call upon all members of our community to start/continue their personal journeys towards understanding and acknowledging Indigenous peoples' histories, truths and cultures. Visit indigenous.utoronto.ca to learn more.

Bedford Trio: Alessia Disimino, violin; Lucia Ticho, cello; Jialiang Zhu, piano
Guest artist – Lindsay McIntyre, soprano

A Recession of Glass for Piano Trio (2024)–World première

William Quan Cheng
Winner of the 2024/25 University of Toronto Piano Trio Composition Competition

Love Drunk for Violin and Piano (Folk Songs, Set No. 16B) (2014)–Canadian première

Reza Vali
2025 Roger D. Moore Distinguished Visitor in Composition

IV. Longing
V. In Memory of a Lost Beloved
VI. The Girl from Shirâz
VII. Love Drunk

Piececitos ("Little Feet") (2018-2022)

Joelle Walach
Poetry by Gabriella Mistral

III. *Apegado a Mi* ("Close Beside Me")
I. *Piececitos* ("Little Feet")

Piano Trio (2019)

Reena Esmail

TEXT/TRANSLATIONS

Apegado a Mi

Velloncito de mi carne,
que en mi entraña yo tejí,
velloncito friolento,
¡duérmete apegado a mí!

Hierbecita temblorosa
asombrada de vivir,
no te sueltes de mi pecho:
¡duérmete apegado a mí!

Yo que todo lo he perdido
ahora tiemblo de dormir.
No resbales de mi brazo:
¡duérmete apegado a mí!

Close to Me
(trans. by Doris Dana; the composer translates the title as "Close beside Me")

Little fleece of my flesh
that I wove in my womb,
little shivering fleece,
sleep close to me!

Little trembling blade of grass
astonished to be alive,
Do not leave my breast:
sleep close to me!

I who have lost everything
shiver at the thought of sleep.
Do not slip away from my arms:
sleep close to me!

Piececitos

Piececitos de niño,
azulosos de frío,
¡cómo os ven y no os cubren,
Dios mío!

¡Piececitos heridos
por los guijarros todos,
ultrajados de nieves
y lodos!

El hombre ciego ignora
que por donde pasáis,
una flor de luz viva
dejáis;

que allí donde ponéis
la plantita sangrante,
el nardo nace más
fragante.

Sed, puesto que marcháis
por los caminos rectos,
heroicos como sois
perfectos.
Piececitos de niño,
dos joyitas sufrientes,
¡cómo pasan sin veros
las gentes!

Little Feet
(trans. by Doris Dana)

Little feet of children
blue with cold,
how can they see you and not cover you—
dear God!

Little wounded feet
cut by every stone,
hurt by snow
and mire.

Man, blind, does not know
that where you pass,
you leave a flower
of living light.

And where you set
your little bleeding foot,
the spikenard blooms
more fragrant.

Walking straight paths,
be heroic, little feet,
as you are
perfect.
Little feet of children,
two tiny suffering jewels,
how can people pass
and not see you!

ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

Founded in 2019 by pianists Pei-Chen Chen and Mengjie Xiong, **Sirius Piano Duo** bridges Canadian and Chinese cultures through music by presenting works from composers of both nations that highlight their shared and distinct traditions. Their performances seamlessly blend classical music with genres like pop and traditional Chinese folk music, often featuring original, innovative arrangements for piano duo. By collaborating with established and emerging artists, they create performances that resonate with multicultural perspectives and inspire deeper understanding through music.
In 2021, Sirius Piano Duo received the Orford Music Scholarship to record the Canadian piano duet series *The Northern Lights*, a pedagogical collection designed to inspire students and teachers with its accessible yet artistically rich works. The series showcases Canadian composers and their unique styles, contributing to the growth of Canadian piano repertoire and highlighting the country's diverse musical heritage. Recently, they presented a lecture-recital at the 2024 Australasian Piano Pedagogy Conference at Monash University in Melbourne, where they explored Canadian cultural identity through music, highlighted key works from *The Northern Lights* series, and discussed its pedagogical value in fostering creativity and technical development among students.
Based in Toronto and Montreal, Sirius Piano Duo actively engages with contemporary composers and diverse audiences through innovative programming. Their work bridges traditional themes with contemporary expressions, celebrating cultural heritage while fostering meaningful artistic dialogue.

Pei-Chen Chen (DMA) is a Taiwanese-Canadian pianist, educator, and researcher recognized for her achievements in North America and Asia. She has won awards at international competitions, including the North West International Piano Ensemble Competition and the United States International Duo Piano Competition. Her recent highlights include solo performances of Canadian composer Cecilia Livingston's works at the Banff Musician Residency and a presentation of Eckhard-Gramatté's one-handed Piano Sonata No. 6 at the Australasian Piano Pedagogy Conference.

As an educator, Pei-Chen incorporates Dalcroze Eurhythmics into her teaching and research. Her project, *"Off the Bench, Sing and Play: Lived Experiences in Dalcroze-Inspired Piano Lessons for Amateur Adults"* earned the Mitacs Globalink Research Award and the SSHRC Doctoral Fellowship. She was also awarded the Selma Odom Prize for Best Student Paper at the International Conference of Dalcroze Studies. Pei-Chen regularly presents at international conferences, including MTNA, NCKP, APPC, and ICDS, and publishes in journals such as Being Music and the Frances Clark Center's Piano Inspires Discovery.

Beyond academia, Pei-Chen actively engages in music organizations as part of her commitment to community outreach and volunteer work. She serves as an adjudicator for Royal Conservatory of Music (RCM) examinations and is the lead editor of Dalcroze Canada Being Music journal. She is also a co-founder and director of the community school Music Insideout, as well as a committee member for the National Conference on Keyboard Pedagogy.

Pei-Chen is a faculty member at the University of Toronto, where she earned her M.Mus and DMA in Piano Performance and Pedagogy.

Pianist and educator Dr. **Mengjie Xiong** leads a versatile musical journey on national and international scenes. As a performer, she appeared in solo recitals and music festivals throughout North America and Europe, with programs ranging from the standard repertoire to new music. Her research on Claude Debussy's Préludes led her to present at the conference Dialogues: Analysis and Performance, held at McGill University in 2021. Dr. Xiong is the recipient of numerous awards including the Orford Artist's Residency Fellowship, the Burgos Music Festival Fellowship, the University of Toronto Fellowship, and the Zoya Solod Memorial Scholarship.

Dr. Xiong received her Doctoral of Musical Arts (D.M.A.) degree in piano performance at the University of Toronto, her Master's and Bachelor's degrees at McGill University. Her professors include Marietta Orlov, Dr. Ilya Poletaev, Dr. Sara Laimon and Richard Raymond. Dr. Xiong is a certified teacher of the Quebec Music Teachers Association and an affiliate at l'École de musique Vincent D'Indy. She also taught in music institutions including the Piano Pedagogy Program of the University of Toronto and the McGill Music Conservatory.

"A triple header of virtuosity," (Toronto Concert Reviews), **Bedford Trio** presents passionate performances of contemporary and traditional repertoire, with a deep commitment to reshaping the future of piano trio music through contemporary commissions and multi-disciplinary artistic collaborations. The trio's performances interweave a respect for the traditional forms alongside a deep desire to launch to the future, engage with the art and culture of our time, and promote a spirit of artistic collaboration of the highest excellence.

The Trio is the 2024/2025 Artist in Residence at the University of Toronto, where they host and adjudicate the Piano Trio Composition Competition as part of the New Music Festival, a position they have held since the Competition's inaugural edition in 2020/2021. As the adjudicators of the Competition, they have hosted workshops and given world premieres of pieces by numerous emerging composers. Bedford Trio is lauded for their series IMMERSED, currently in it's fourth edition, which highlights their dedication to multi-artistic collaboration of contemporary works written for the trio, alongside captivating digital, lighting, dance, and visual art. Bedford Trio's yearly concert series has received support by both the Toronto Arts Council and the Ontario Arts Council, and frequently features guest instrumentalists, composers, and artists.

Bedford Trio has performed in Canada, the United States, and Europe. They were a finalist in the 2018 Anton Rubinstein International Chamber Music (Germany) and a semi-finalist group in the 2019 Fischoff Chamber Music Competition (USA). Past notable appearances include the Career Development Residency at Ottawa Chamberfest under the mentorship of Gryphon Trio, a virtual season-opening gala concert at the Tartini Conservatory in Trieste, Italy, and a recent engagement of the Beethoven Triple Concerto at Roy Thomson Hall (November 2024) with the Brampton Rose Orchestra as part of the Skyky Multicultural Learning Foundation's Youth Fundraising Concert for the SickKids Foundation. The Trio looks forward to performing the Beethoven Triple Concerto once again with the Rose Orchestra in October 2025.

Bedford Trio is committed to commissioning and performing contemporary repertoire by both established and emerging composers. Since 2018, the trio has been working with grade eleven composition students at Earl Haig Secondary School, workshopping their pieces throughout the academic year and performing them as part of the year-end showcase. The trio is dedicated to bringing live music performance to a diverse audience and has given recitals in senior residences, community centres, hospices, and hospitals across Ontario. During the 2019-2020 season, the trio delivered sensory-friendly concerts for autistic youth and their families and performed for adults with Alzheimer in collaboration with the charity organization Xenia Concerts.

Toronto-based Bedford Trio was founded in 2016, and features award winning founding-member instrumentalists Alessia Disimino (violin) and Jialiang Zhu (piano). This season, Lucia Ticho (cello) joins the ensemble.

Award-winning Toronto and Boston-based violinist **Alessia Disimino** is recognized for her thoughtful musicality and instinctive interpretations. She is a founding member of the Bedford Trio, and graduate of the University of Toronto's Master of Music (2017) and Bachelor of Music with a Minor in English (2015). Alessia has served as the concertmaster of North York Concert Orchestra (2017-2024) and founder and Director of Strings at the North York String Academy. Alessia is a passionate concert curator and teacher, and performs extensively as a chamber musician, concertmaster, orchestral violinist, and community outreach artist. She has appeared as soloist with the Brampton Rose Orchestra, the North York Concert Orchestra, and the Toronto Concert Orchestra. A recipient of numerous awards, Alessia has received fellowships to Bowdoin International Music Festival and Toronto Summer Music Festival, and attended summer festivals including the Tafelmusik Baroque Summer Institute, the Orford Academy, and the Domaine Forget Academy. Alessia is a Master of Theological Studies scholarship student at Boston College's Clough School of Theology and Ministry and Graduate Assistant of the Boston College Orchestra and Chamber Music program. Her research interests lie in the intersection of theology with performance practice.

Cellist **Lucia Ticho** enjoys an active career as a performer and teacher. She is a member of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra and the Colorado Music Festival Orchestra, and has played with the Houston Symphony, the St. Louis Symphony, and the Classical Tahoe Orchestra. She has appeared as soloist with the Brampton Rose Orchestra, the Elgin Symphony, and other ensembles in the Chicago area, where she was born and raised. Lucia is sought-after chamber musician in concert series across North America, including Houston DACAMERA, Chamber Music @ New Park, and Music Around the Corner (Toronto), and advocate and enthusiast for new music, having performed with the Aspen Contemporary Ensemble, AXIOM, Loop38, the New Juilliard Ensemble, and the Shepherd School Contemporary Ensemble. Lucia is a dedicated teacher whose students have been accepted to competitive pre-college programs including Manhattan School of Music, Jacobs School of Music at Indiana University, and the Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music. Lucia attended Columbia University (Bachelor of Arts, 2020), The Juilliard School (Master of Music, 2021), and Rice University.

Chinese pianist **Jialiang Zhu** passionately embraces the roles of performer, educator, concert producer, and researcher. She is the co-founder of classical ensemble Bedford Trio and a Chamber Music Faculty

at the Phil and Eli Taylor Performance Academy of the Royal Conservatory of Music. With the support from Canada Council for the Arts and Ontario Arts Council in 2023-2025, Jialiang produced and performed in two concert series, “The Power of Words” and “Empowered by Friendship,” to explore her connections with fellow Canadian and international artists and showcase their works of music and poetry. A specialist in Chinese art song, she has performed this repertoire with vocalists at various cultural organization including Canadian Opera Company, University of Toronto, University of Ottawa, and Beijing Central Conservatory of Music. Her article “Singing Classical Chinese Poetry” was published in *Art Song Canada* Winter 2022 Issue. Jialiang is currently pursuing a Doctor of Musical Arts (DMA) Degree at U of T, where she previously received a Master’s Degree in Piano Performance and Pedagogy and Bachelor’s Degree in Piano Performance with Honours. Her doctoral thesis is a performance guide for non-Mandarin speakers on how to tackle Chinese art song and poetry.

To learn about Bedford Trio’s latest events, please visit bedfordtrio.com/concerts and follow them on Instagram @bedford trio.

Lindsay McIntyre is a Canadian vocal artist whose work lies at the intersection of technical precision and the magic of mindful experience. Awed by the natural world, Lindsay believes music making is a form of transfiguration: creating moments out of thin air. A scholar of the voice, body, and meditative practices, Lindsay is particularly passionate about using her instrument as a vessel for contemporary music. Lindsay is a versatile soprano, celebrated for her crystalline extension, grounded presence, and captivating vocal colour.

Recent concert performances include Orff’s “Carmina Burana” with the Grand Philharmonic Choir, Handel’s “Messiah” with RESOUND choir, Mendelssohn’s “Elijah” with the Toronto Mendelssohn Choir and Toronto Symphony Orchestra, and Handel’s “Dixit Dominus” with the Toronto Mendelssohn Singers.

Lindsay performs regularly with Toronto-based contemporary music company Soundstreams, with recent highlights including Reich’s “Drumming” with NEXUS and Torq percussion quartets, three seasons of “Electric Messiah,” a reimagined version of Handel’s classic piece, and two programs of the music of Claude Vivier which toured internationally in 2022.
In the summer of 2023, with support from the Canada Council for the Arts, Lindsay took part in the Yellow Barn Summer Music Festival - an international chamber music festival in Putney, Vermont, and was a winter 2024 Musician-in-Residence at the Banff Centre for Arts & Creativity.

PROGRAM NOTES

In this **Sound Worlds** program, Sirius Piano Duo and Bedford Trio offer a profound exploration of soundscapes, from the celestial and otherworldly to the intimate and deeply personal dimensions of musical expression.

The program begins with **David Lang's** “**Before Gravity**.” Lang, a Professor of Music Composition at the Yale School of Music and one of the most highly esteemed American composers today, explores the concept of weightlessness in sound through this work. The composition is meticulously structured around a 10-measure time signature cycle (3/4, 5/8, 2/4, 5/8, 3/4, 5/8, 2/4, 3/8, 2/4, 3/8). Through minimalistic note usage and strategic register shifts, Lang creates a texture that is ethereal and floating, evoking a sense of airiness while maintaining structural coherence. The piece resists resolution, intentionally delaying any sense of grounding to enhance its otherworldly quality.

This ethereal atmosphere is further explored in **Alexina Louie's** “**The Ringing Earth**,” the second movement from her work *Afterimages for Two Pianos*. Louie, a distinguished Canadian composer, is renowned for her fusion of Asian and Western influences, which defines her unique compositional voice. In “The Ringing Earth,” shimmering textures and resonant harmonies evoke the interplay between humanity and nature, crafting a sonic environment that bridges the physical and metaphysical worlds. The movement reflects Louie’s distinctive voice, where tradition and innovation intersect seamlessly.

From these cosmic and abstract domains, the program shifts inward to **Ching-Yu Hsiau's** "**Nostalgia (懷)**." A Taiwanese composer and professor at the National Taiwan Normal University, deeply influenced by French contemporary piano music, Hsiau draws from personal memory to craft this poignant work. Utilizing perfect fifths and minor seconds centered on A#, "Nostalgia" captures the soundscape of her mother's funeral. The piece has two sections. The first section is abstract, featuring atonal harmonies and fragmented melodic lines that create an otherworldly atmosphere. In the second section, the incessant rhythm of the wood fish and the chanting of sutras establish a haunting sonic imprint, evoking a deeply meditative and ritualistic soundscape. This atonal composition employs contemporary techniques, including prepared piano, tapping, and striking the piano strings, to create a texture that is both evocative and innovative.

From memories of a cherished one, the program broadens to a wider sound world with **Nancy Galbraith's *Effervescent Air***. Professor of Composition at the Carnegie Mellon University School of Music, the American composer Galbraith is recognized for her use of rich harmonic texture, rhythmic vitality and emotional depth in her work. *Effervescent Air* is an instrumental ensemble work rearranged to a two-piano composition. Written in three movements, each movement is inspired by a distinct element of nature and crafted to evoke a unique auditory journey for the listener. The opening movement, "Effervescent Air," begins with a luminous and sparkling interplay of melodies between the pianists. Its nimble character is enriched by folklike themes and rhythmic vitality as the movement progresses, before dissolving into a delicate, almost ethereal conclusion. The second movement, "Sylphine Sails," paints a serene and introspective landscape. Its tranquil melodies and flowing harmonies conjure a timeless, otherworldly realm—serene yet profoundly reflective, like the gentle passage of a breeze across still waters. The final movement, "Coal and Ice," is a dramatic and exhilarating conclusion. The percussive energy and rhythmic complexity bring a fiery intensity to the music, recalling the clashing forces of heat and cold in nature's wild dance.

The Sirius Duo portion of the program concludes with **David Lang's "After Gravity."** Echoing "Before Gravity," this work seeks to evoke a sense of suspension. Divided into two sections, the first section unfolds with a 10-measure time signature cycle (3/8, 2/4, 5/8, 2/4, 3/8, 2/4,5/8,3/4, 5/8, 2/4) while the second section is shifting into a 4-measure time signature cycle (7/8, 4/4, 7/8, 3/4). By using syncopations, Lang's delicate interplay of rhythm and texture combine a timeless space, leaving the audience suspended in a tranquil, gravity-defying stillness.

In the second half of the program, Bedford Trio continues to showcase soundscapes and stories that are rooted in a wide variety of sources each unique, enchanting, and heartfelt. Winner of the 2024/25 University of Toronto Piano Trio Composition Competition, **William Quan Cheng** is pursuing his undergraduate studies in Composition at the U of T's Faculty of Music. In his work **"A Recession of Glass"** (2024), an imaginary world is controlled by a sinister force and enclosed under a layer of glass. Despite the presence of a lush green forest, a rushing river, and a cool field of grass, there are no inhabitants in sight. However, everything starts to change as a lone child appears in this imaginary world and curiously explores their surroundings. Will the child be safe? How will their encounter with the sinister force turn out? Eventually, the glass shatters at the edges of the world and recedes into nothing, revealing the ideal paradisiacal world underneath. (Notes by William Quan Cheng)

Reza Vali is the 2025 Roger D. Moore Distinguished Visitor in Composition at the University of Toronto's Faculty of Music. Born in Ghazvin, Iran, in 1952, Vali is known for his ingenious blend of traditional Iranian music and Western compositional techniques. He has been a faculty member at the School of Music at Carnegie Mellon University since 1988.

Completed in July 2014, ***Love Drunk*** **(Folk Songs, Set No. 16B)** is the sixteenth set of an ongoing cycle of Persian folk songs that Vali has been composing since 1978. The work's four songs (songs without words) reflect upon different aspects of love. In song No. 1, "Longing," the lover is longing for a reunion with the beloved. Song No. 2, "In Memory of a Lost Beloved," is a dialogue, across the dimensions, between the deceased beloved and the grieving lover. The song reflects upon the grief of separation – in this case, separation by death. The sensual and the spiritual aspects of love intersect in song No. 3, "The

Girl from Shiraz." The melodies of the third song are accompanied by quotes from the Christmas carol Silent Night, Wagner's Tristan and Isolde, and Messiaen's Quartet for the End of Time. The final song No. 4, "Love Drunk," describes the intoxicating joy when the lovers meet. (Notes by the publisher Lauren Keiser Music Publishing)

Nominee for the 1997 Pulitzer Prize in Music and winner of the Inter-America Music Awards, **Joelle Wallach** is a celebrated American composer of orchestral music, chamber music, and music for solo voices and choirs. Wallace's song cycle ***Piececitos*** is a dramatic musical meditation on motherhood, migration and exile based on poems by Gabriella Mistral, the first Latin American to win a Nobel Prize in Literature. Set in the original Spanish, *Piececitos*' five songs for voice, violin, cello and piano interweave Latin American dance rhythms with haunting melodies, the songs, lullabies and laments of a mother on her treacherous journey toward refuge.

The third movement, "Apegarde a mi (Close Beside Me)," depicts a toddler close beside his mother as threatening hands hover invisibly over their shoulders. His little feet take tiny, tripping steps on the long walk toward safety. In the first movement, "Piececitos (Little Feet)," the journey begins with simple harmonies that grow disturbing as the mother flees toward safety with her children. A baby is tied to her back, while a toddler trudges beside her on tiny feet, blue from the cold and bruised from the terrain. Trilling strings intermittently appear as crowds of ululating women and crying children, the high shrill trills and battering sounds of heart-pounding terror and alarm, echoes and hallucinations of angelic or threatening voices, and each movement ends with a teardrop. (Notes by Joelle Wallach)

Indian-American composer **Reena Esmail**'s works straddle two of the world's most sophisticated musical traditions. On one side is the art music of Europe and its system of tonal harmony that developed over the last four hundred years, and on the other, Hindustani classical music from North India, organized around collections of tones known as raags that go back many centuries further.

Writing a **Piano Trio** has fulfilled one of Esmail's oldest ambitions as a musician. Growing up as a talented pianist, trios with violin and cello were her favorite form of chamber music. She applies authentic raags in each movement of the trio, including the monsoon season raag known as Megh that informs a chorale from the strings and other gestures in the first movement. In a tempo marked "Ephemeral," the smooth modal phrases and long slurs highlight Esmail's affinity with Ravel, who also looked outside the Western canon to expand his shimmering soundscapes. By casting the quivering third movement as a *scherzo*, Esmail acknowledges her debt to Mendelssohn, but moments of manic hilarity and sheer muscle recall a more subversive master of the piano trio – Shostakovich. (Notes by Aaron Grad)